CHAPTER II

ETHNICITY AND NATION BUILDING IN NEPAL
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Ethnic and religious plurality had remained the two most unsung aspects of the Hindu kingdom of Nepal. Over the period of history, the world viewed the Himalayan state, in the way the country's ruling dynasty and its Hindu upper caste oligarkhia projected it, as a "homogeneous Hindu nation". In reality, Nepal can be aptly described as Asia's ethnic turn table as it presents a unique setting for interaction between the oriental Kirant (Mongoloid) and Occidental Khasa (Caucosoid) people. In other words, Nepal is a small country with great diversity. It was a land of transition (both natural and cultural) between the northern highland and southern lowland as well as the occidental Khasa and oriental Kirant.

Population census analysis in 1993, for the first time in the history of Nepal's census publication, has included a list of Nepal's ethnic and caste groups. The list identifies around sixty four ethnic and caste groups in Nepal. Notwithstanding its patchy reputation for accuracy, the very mention of separate ethnic/caste list by the Nepalese census [by not


equating them with linguistic groups, as has been the practice in the previous census reports], has been hailed as one of the positive impacts of the democratic change in Nepal.

**Pluralistic Mosaic**

Likewise its varied and asymmetrical geographical terrain, inhabitants of Nepal also vary in their cultural, linguistic and racial identity. The wide array of social groups are described by Andras Hofer as groups speaking 40 different languages; three historically and regionally distinct caste hierarchies, a number of loosely defined groups in the middle hills, and culturally distinct Tibeto-Burman speaking populations along the northern frontier. In terms of racial origin the people of Nepal actually fall into three main divisions: Mongoloid, Aryan, and some small isolated groups of pre-Aryan indigenous people. Scholars studying Nepali society however, differ in their opinions on the major racial groups of Nepal. While the predominant view is that of classifying the population into two main racial groups of Indo-Aryan (Caucosoid) and Mongoloid racial stock, many like to include Austro-Asians also in their categorisation. Some anthropologists do not

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SOURCE: HARKA GURUNG, NEPAL MAIN ETHNIC CASTE GROUPS BY DISTRICTS BASED ON POPULATION CENSUS 1991 (KATHMANDU, SEPTEMBER 1994)
point out the distinctions between the aboriginal or the indigenous people from the rest of the racial stock.⁵

A consequence of the cultural pluralism is clearly manifest in numerous linguistic groups that exist in Nepal. Linguists working in Nepal have calculated about forty principal minority languages, most of them of the Tibeto-Burman family. The Rai-Limbus, Tamangs, Magars, Gurungs, Sunwars, Bhotes, Newars, Sherpas are included in this sub-family or in the Mongoloids.⁶ In most places, these cultural-linguistic groups have lived in certain well-defined geographic regions. Maithilis, Avadhis, Bhojpuris and Tharus are largely concentrated in Nepal plains (Terai). The Newars are mostly settled in and around the business centres of Kathmandu valley; and Gurungs, Rais, Limbus, Magars, Thakalis of Mongoloid origin are generally found in middle and the north western region, while the various indigenous or other language groups are concentrated in the inner Terai and in different pockets in the hills and middle mountain ranges. Finally, majority of the Muslim population are concentrated in middle and western Terai districts. That leaves only the Brahmins (Bahuns) and Chetris who are the only group to be found all over Nepal.⁷

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⁶ A.R. Poudyal, n.4. p. 17. However, Harka Gurung terms this trend of transposition of linguistic labels in ethnic context, as a loose one, Nepalese anthropological literature according to Gurung, interchangeably uses Indo-Aryan for caucasoid or khasa and Tibeto Burman for Mongoloid or Kirat. See Ethnic Demography of Nepal. A paper presented at a talk programme organised by Nepal Foundation for Advanced Studies (NEFAS) Jan. 10, 1996, Kathmandu.

⁷ Ibid., p.20.
The unique geographical location of Nepal also explains the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, complex and diverse character of Nepal's population. Thus describing the ethnic diversity, social scientists have highlighted that the cultural milieu of Nepal is essentially the expression of geographical as well as historical factors. The present racial complexity is attributed to the migration of various racial and ethnic groups from North, South and Southwest frontiers into Nepal. The main waves of migration were those of Mongoloids (Kirats) from the east and north, and of Caucasoids (Khasa) from west and south.\(^8\) In fact the ethnology of the country can largely be explained through the same historical processes that affected the racial character of India.

The ethnographic pattern that finally emerged was also the result of historical process of human settlement, viz. the trend of Caucasoid Khasa expansion and consolidation in Nepal from west to east. The eastern region has more ethnic groups in hills, and castes in Terai. The mid western and far west have an overwhelming Caucasoid caste population. The western central region represent the zone of contact of Caucasoid, caste and Mongoloid tribal groups. Kathmandu valley represents the vortex of this cultural interface.\(^9\)

**The Making of Ethnographic Nepal**

To understand the multi-cultural society of Nepal one has to look back at the pre-mid 18th century period which portrays a picture of congeries of diverse political and cultural units. From the ancient period, migratory waves from different geographical regions especially from

\(^8\) Harka Gurung, n.4, p.138.

\(^9\) Ibid.
the plains of north India and the Tibetan highlands, moved to Nepal. The country gradually
became a meeting and spawning ground of migrants and this, according to some scholars,
proved decisive to its history and social evolution. Geographers and sociologists identify four
broad regions of political culture; these are the river basin foundations stretched from far east
to the far west of the country along with three mountain ranges - Himalaya, Mahabharata and
Siwalik which lie along an East-west axis. These river drainage systems with the deep gorges
and rugged ridges, vastly complicate east-west communication. Thus Bagmati, Kosi, Gandaki
and Karnali river drainage basins saw the rise of the most distinctive political culture. The
earliest settlers in the Bagmati river basin were the Newars. The fertile valley, because of its
horticulture productivity and trade surplus, supported the growth of city-states, brought in
economic prosperity and contributed to the cultural pursuits of the local Newaris. The valley
naturally attracted many migrants and conquerors coming to settle or to seek refuge, from all
directions at various times in history. The conquerors, many feel, in the process imported their
deities and imposed a cosmopolitan culture in the Nepal valley, from where the new kingdom
took its name.

The Kosi river basin, in the east of Nepal had been the homeland of various Kirat
tribes. Among them the largest groups were the Tamangs from the west of Tamba Kosi, the
Khambus between Tamba kosi and Arun, and the Limbus of the east of Arun river. To the
west of Nepal (Kathmandu) valley, lie the Gandaki basin, its earliest inhabitants were the

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Magars, who were found mainly in the lower hills. During the medieval period, they had a confederation of Twelve Nations Barah Magarant whereas the higher region was occupied by the Gurungs. Barah Magarant eventually disintegrated with the coming of the Khasa Thakuri from the west. In the words of Harka Gurung - "They were the western offshoots of the Kirats (Mongoloids), and bore the brunt of Khasa expansion from the west since the 12th century". By the 18th century, the Gandaki basin had at least 24 Chaubisi petty states with Thakuri chiefs. Most of the Karnali basin (i.e. the area west of Gandaki) had a homogeneous Khasa population, except for the northern belt of higher mountains. Since the 14th century, Khasa empire began to disintegrate and finally emerged as a conglomeration of 22 small principalities Baisi.

The Gorkha Conquest

The State of Gorkha was one of such small Chaubisi principalities of the Gandaki basin in the mid-western hills. Hence, the rulers of the Gorkhas trace their origin to the Khasas. Gorkha principality was surrounded by fertile lands of Darraundi river valley, and to its north was Barpak - a territory adjoining to Tibet and had Gurung settlement. The population of the

12 Ibid.
13 F.B. Hamilton, An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal and of the Territories Annexed to this Dominion by the House of Gorkha (Edinburgh, 1819), p.27.
14 Kumar Pradhan, n.11, p.32-33. While explaining this historical event Kumar Pradhan writes that 14th century onwards, as an aftermath of Muslim invasion of north India, high caste Hindu Brahmins and Kshatriyas (Rajputs) infiltrated in the western hills of Nepal. The local Khasas of western hills, who according to Pradhan, were non-Brahminical tribe and speakers of Indo-Aryan language, got absorbed into Thakuri/Chetri (the khasa term of Kshatriya) caste (pp. 160-161).
state was a combination of Khasa and Mongoloid manpower, and was influenced by the
culture of Nepal valley (present day Kathmandu) because of its proximity to the region.\textsuperscript{15} It
were the successors of King Dravya Shah (founder of the state), who carried on the task of
territorial expansion. Ram Shah (1606-1636) captured many adjoining settlements like
Lamjung and Tanahu. Although, since the establishment of the state, Gorkha kings had active
support of all their subjects comprising of different social groups like Magar, Gurung and the
Khasa Brahmins. It was however, during Ram Shah's reign, that for the first time a legal code,
was introduced to consolidate the administrative organization.\textsuperscript{16}

The expansionist phase of Gorkha rule began immediately after Prithvinarayan Shah
ascended the throne in 1743. From the historical description it is evident that the main objective
behind Prithvinarayan's conquest was economic exploitation of the subjugated principalities. To
make itself economically viable, the small and poor states of Gorkha had tried to seize and
control passes, through which trans-himalayan trade moved. In this pursuit Prithvinarayan
Shah's prime target was Nepal valley (present day Kathmandu), ruled by the Newari Malla
dynasty. Rich in agriculture and manufacture, the valley was the epicentre of trade and
commerce in the region.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.24.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.25.
\textsuperscript{17} Ludwig F. Stiller, \textit{The Rise of the House of Gorkha} (New Delhi 1973), p.ix; Also refer
The conquest of Nepal valley kingdoms came after twenty five years of long-drawn campaign. The defeat of the Malla kings and subsequent annexation of the Nepal valley in 1769 marked the beginning of the Modern Nepalese history under the Gorkha rule. However Gorkha dynasty's crusade for annexing territories did not come to an end with the conquest of the valley. It continued incessantly both in Kosi region in the east and also in the further west, for control over the principalities which had passes to Tibet (to facilitate trade). Conquests were also aimed at possessing mines, and parts of fertile gangetic plains in Terai. Thus, in the following decades, the kingdom of Gorkha expanded almost till the Sutlej (Garhwal) in the west and the Tista (Sikkim) in the east, when finally the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16 forced Nepal to abandon the regions of Kumaon and Sikkim and reduced its boundaries to its present status. Prithvinarayan Shah is thus described as the founder of present day Nepal. Historians in Nepal are also of the view that unification of Nepal, and not mere territorial expansion, was his noble intention, and accordingly portrayed him as a greater crusader of national unification rather than an ambitious king. Even in the absence of historical evidences on whether the regions embraced by the present day Nepal, ever remained a single unit in the form of a country or a nation, supporters of the national unification theory maintain that Nepal conformed to its present shape in the ancient past. However, in Prithvinarayan's own words, in his Divya Upadesh, he described his dominion as 'a painfully acquired kingdom'. Whatever may be the

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18 Ibid; Harka Gurung; n.4, p.136.
19 Baburam Acharya Nepalko Sanskrita Vrittanta (Kathmandu), p.45; M.C. Regmi, n.17, p.10.
20 K. Pradhan, n.11, p.15. For further details, see Ludwig F. Stiller Prithvinarayan Shah in the Light of Divya Upadesh (Kathmandu, 1968).
pre-unification status of the disparate principalities, undoubtedly the Gorkha king initiated his own nation-building process, for the first time by bringing together diverse racial, religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups, and also independent political entities. He did this by introducing homogeneous national culture based on common religion (Hinduism), language (Nepali i.e. Khas Bhasa) and a uniform social structure on the lines of four-fold Hindu caste division. Irrespective of the debate on the existence of a unified Nepal in ancient times, Prithvinarayan Shah was well aware of the heteronomous character of the newly annexed territories and its complex ethnic mix which lacked even a single common bond of nationality. Recognizing the fact that the feelings of nationalism can be generated only by the binding factors like common language, culture, or even by the feeling of a shared nationality - and that none of the above mentioned factors were present in the unified principalities termed as Nepal, the Gorkha king tried to give his kingdom a uniform identity - which saw the Gorkhanisation [commonly interpreted as Nepalisation or Hinduisation] of the diverse Himalayan society. Initiated by Prithvinarayan Shah and followed by his successors, the Gorkha kings based the country's unification on four key ideas: - one, unquestioning power and authority of the Hindu king of Gorkha; two, the supremacy of the Hindu ethos in national life; three, social integration through the Hindu social system based on caste division; and four, recognition of Nepali (Gorkhali or Khas Bhasha) as the language of government, administration and in more recent times, education.21 Explaining his policies of governance, amidst cultural plurality, Prithvinarayan Shah had stated in his 'Divya Upadesh' that they were like "a garden bedecked with four varnas and thirty six jats" which means he tried to synthesize the complex cultural

21 Prayag Raj Sharma, n.2; p.7; A.R. Poudyal, n.4, pp.32-33.
conglomeration by bringing it under Hindu four-fold social divisions known as caste or varna and thus making the thirty six 'jats' or 'tribes' or nationalities as part of the Hindu social and cultural order.  

The Process of Socio-cultural Transformation

In order to understand the present day Nepali society, one has to analyse the social and political factors which played a determining role in the growth of a nation. M.C. Regmi, an authority on Nepalese economic history writes,

Nepali political history had its central genesis in the midlands whose inhabitants dominated the social, political, economic life of the country. Members of Nepal's political elite, the bureaucracy, and the army have traditionally come from these regions, and the Tarai played scarcely any role in politics, the administration or the army. They were important to the newly established Gorkhali state solely because of the role of their inhabitants as peasants, porters, artisans, and tax payers. Nepal's political elite, therefore, has traditionally belonged to the central and midlands.

Regmi further observed that even among the people of central and midland regions, "social and economic leadership was provided by Brahmans and Chetris, the descendants of

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22 P.R. Sharma, ibid., K. Pradhan, n.11, p.155. It would be useful here to make a subtle distinction of native terms Jat (caste) for the caucoids (vis. khasas) and Jati (nationality) for the Mongoloids although they have a common etymology in the sense of 'species'. The former pertains to vertical (hierarchial social) status differentiation and the latter to horizontal (spacial) groupings - as pointed out by Harka Gurung, n.6, p.2.

23 M.C. Regmi, Land ownership in Nepal (Berkeley 1976), pp.6-7.
early immigrants from northern India and members of local Khas community who had succeeded in elevating their caste and social status”. Even if it is obvious from the historical studies that the creation of a large Gorkhali state resulted in the emergence of two sections in the society, the rulers and the ruled or the subjugators - it is also essential to study the prevalent social relations, such as the contacts between the high caste immigrants from India, and the native hill tribes to understand the formation of the Nepali society. To study the social contacts between the high caste North Indian immigrants and hill tribals, one has to trace back to the ancient period of the history of present Nepal as historical studies of different periods reveal a general recurring pattern of such contacts at different points of time with only variations in the degree of intensity. However, the region where maximum of confluence between the two differing cultures occurred was the middle region or the hills known as Pahar that remained the matrix of Nepal's history. The people of this zone who are known as Pahares culturally designated as Nepalis and Gorkhas, are distinguished from the Madhesis or plainsmen of the Terai and also from the Bhotias of the high Himalayas.

Historian Kumar Pradhan feels that a significant social consequence of the Gorkha conquest of the valley (Kathmandu) was the 'metamorphosis' undergone by the Newar nationality. The Newars, the earliest occupants of the valley over the period of time through the process of admixture among the valley autochthonous, Mongoloid Kirati people, and the Indo-Aryan Hindu migrants from the South (viz. the Lichchavis who moved into the valley as early as the 1st century A.D.), emerged as a distinct community with a rich cultural heritage.

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24 Ibid., p.8.
25 K. Pradhan, n.11, p.158.
Speakers of Tibeto-Burman language, Newaris grew up on the substructure of the Mongoloid culture although they got Aryanised due to their co-mingling with the Hindu Lichchavis and by their eventual establishment of Brahmanical domination in the valley. However, with the coming of the Gorkhas there initiated a process of political domination by the high caste Pahares or the Brahmin-Chetris from the west, and the Newars for the first time came to be regarded as a 'jat' or caste in the emergent Pan Gorkhali (Nepali) society.

Imposition of a homogeneous national culture on all the conquered tribal territories, was the single most important step taken by the Gorkha rulers towards their nation building endeavour in Nepal. They realized that the best possible way by which the multicultural Mongoloid societies could be integrated, was through creation of horizontal divisions (in the society), based on caste hierarchy. Newly imposed caste groupings not only provided a uniform identity to the diverse population of unified Nepal, it also helped in toning down the existing group cleavages based on ethnic, religious, linguistic and tribal differences. Thus post unification period (i.e. 1769 onwards) witnessed a gradual transformation of different 'jati' or tribe or nationality, to 'jat' or caste. The fallout of such an integrative policy didn't obviously remain confined to the Newars of the valley but affected almost all the Mongoloid communities in the entire region.


27 M.C. Regmi maintains that "the term Newar before 1769 denoted nationality which thereafter used for a caste", in his article "Some Questions on Pali History", CNAS Journal, (Kathmandu)vol.13, no.2, 1979, p.2.
Infact with the gradual eastward movements of the Parbates [not to be confused with Pahares] i.e. Khasa Brahmins, Chetris and Thakuris, or in other words the high caste hill Hindus, who constituted the two upper hierarchies of the varna system, all the regions occupied by Mongoloid tribes like Magars and Gurungs underwent this process of transformation. Gorkha as mentioned earlier itself was one such principality carved out by the Khasa Thakuris in Magarat. As this process of absorption into the Hindu fold went on, the subjugated tribes the Magars, and Gurungs (to a lesser extent) acquired dual status. This was due to the initial assignment of Kshatriya (Chetri) status to tribes - which gave rise to many common clan names between the Chetris and the Magars, but later they were relegated to lower orders. However, after the conversion of caste identity, the Magar and Gurung communities were accommodated into the new political structure, but mostly as the lower and middle echelons of the army rather than as prospective claimants to political power and according to M.C. Regmi this policy was also followed in the case of land ownership.

Similarly Rai-Limbu and the Kirati people of Eastern Nepal experienced socio-cultural changes after being overpowered by the Gorkhas. Thus the society that emerged on the basis of a system which recognized a horizontal gradation could not exist without affecting its tribal


29 M.C. Regmi, n.23, p.9. Also refer Pradyumna Karan & Hiroshi Ishi, Nepal: A Himalayan Kingdom in Transition (Tokyo, 1996), pp. 159-162. While writing about the 'Parbate' Hindu dominance and influence, the authors narrates how the ethnic groups such as Magars, Gurungs, Rais & Limbus, who joined the army of King Prithvinarayan Shah and helped him in annexing territories to consolidate his empire, - gradually got absorbed into the middle rank of the caste hierarchy (as 'Chetris') because the top rank was reserved for the Khasa Brahmins and Thakuris (the Gorkha King himself belonged to Thakuri origin).
population that got transformed into intra-caste groups. The awareness of superior and subordinate in such hierarchical divisions permeated into these groups. Political unification of such disparate geographical regions along with its miscellaneous people and culture, was the single most important achievement of the Gorkha dynasty. However, the most unfortunate thing that happened to the post unification Nepal was the creation of a sharp dichotomy in the social order. Two broad social categories that developed as the result of Hinduization of the non-Hindus, were the 'tagadharis' (those who wear the Brahmanical sacred thread) and 'matwalis' (alcohol drinking people). The first group consisted of the Brahmins, Thakuris and Chetris, while the vanquished people of Mongoloid origin like the Newars, Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Rais, Limbus, Sunuwars and others were clubbed together at a lower social rank and were termed as 'Matwalis'. It must however be mentioned that Kirat society in general had remained tribal - even after they were conquered by the Gorkhas - and were thus treated as Sudras (lowest caste of Hindu hierarchy) by the ruling elites. In sum, the political unification of Nepal by the Gorkhas definitely accelerated, if not started (the process of) Hinduization and intensified the process of status usurpation by the higher order Hindus. Kumar Pradhan in his study observes that "the birth of unified kingdom of Nepal in no way created a unified society. It did not unite the segregated groups brought under it, on the contrary it divided them. This was because their relationship was now based on usurpation and exploitation and not on a sense of equality - a sine qua non in the process of nation-building".  

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The Building of A Nepali Nation

It is obvious that the concept of nation building was initiated by the Gorkha King Prithvi Narayan Shah as soon as he consolidated his reign (1769 onwards) over diverse range of lands and its peoples. The institution of monarchy through the use of state power and Hindu religion (i.e. religion of the monarch) and its cultural ethos, crafted a homogenized national culture for a divergent population. A frame of caste order based on the principles of Hinduism was provided for, by the state at various stages in the history of the country. But the most strict implementation of this Hindu social code came in with the imposition of 'Muluki Ain' (the legal code of 1854), developed and promulgated by the first Rana Prime Minister Jang Bahadur, during the reign of King Surendra Bir Bikram Shah in 1854 A.D. The Legal Code of 1854 devoted a major part of it in defining social relations between various castes, the infringement of which became a state offence. Thus caste hierarchy became a state protected ideology in Nepal. Although the code underwent many revisions, in its subsequent editions, these alterations were only minor so that the rules of intercaste relations remained unchanged, until 1963, when a new law was enforced ['Muliki Ain' of 1963]. Therefore, the ethnic mix that we see in Nepal today is the outcome of governmental attempts to grapple with the country's ethnic diversity and peoples' respective responses to the system that the government created.

Andras Hofer in his landmark study, 'The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal', observed that the government needed to create a national caste system in order to legitimate Nepal's separate political identity; to unify the country internally; and to establish a cohesive legal

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system in place of existing regional system. 32 The mechanism of comprehensive legal code thus included legislation on commensality and physical contact and specified different punishments according to the caste status of the person involved. 33 Commensurate with its policy of creating Hindu caste based social structure, the Nepalese state also reinforced the cultural dominance of Hindu groups, and disadvantaged those groups that were compatible with the Hindu norms. One of the natural consequences of such state sponsored policy was that the non-Hindu groups, with the exception of remotely situated Tibetan groups, came to deal with the state as the state defined them, in the guise of castes. In her study, Levine observes that “caste was particularly effective in integrating the diverse (middle hills) groups, because it is at base, an incorporative model for ethnicity”. 34 The Nepali state during the Rana rule tried to integrate the pluralistic cultures of Nepal into a single scheme of the Hindu caste universe. Through the inclusion of all the ethnic groups into the Hindu social framework; treating each one of them as ‘equivalent of a caste; however, a flexible approach and provisions of an upward social mobility were also adapted to suit the conditions of Nepal.

According to the Legal Code of 1854, all recognised social groups were grouped in four main categories which would be as follows when hierarchically arranged:

1. Tagadhari Twice born castes, (literally thread wearing castes)

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34 Ibid.
2 Matwali

Alcohol drinking castes.

3 Pani na Chaine choi
Chhito halnu naparne

Non-untouchable castes i.e. from whom water could not be accepted but whose touch does not require aspergation of water.

4 Pani na chaile
Choi chhito halnu parne

Untouchable castes

The 'Tagadharis' who occupy the apex-position in the above mentioned caste hierarchy consisted of several caste groups and their sub-groups. Their linear hierarchical order is as follows:

1. Upadhyaya Brahmans
2. Rajputs (Thakuri in common language)
3. Jaisi Brahmans
4. Chetris

The next social category was the 'matwalis' or drinking castes in it. They had two sub-categories: one consisted of the unenslavable (na masine) matwalis who were deemed higher, and the other made up of enslavable (masine) matwalis who were considered inferior. The former class consisted of the more prominent groups such as the Magars, the Gurungs, the Newars, the Rais and the Limbus. While the enslavable category (masine) of the matwalis included Bhotya, Chepang, Majhi, Pamwar, Kuimal, Pahari and Mechi. Below them came the impure and untouchable castes.36

35 See Andras Hofer n.32 for an exhaustive detail of an all embracing 'national' hierarchy and about each caste and ethnic group that fall in such categories, pp.44-46.

36 Ibid. Also see Prayag Raj Sharma, "Caste, Social Mobility and Sanskritization" Kailash (Kathmandu) 5(4) 1977, pp.282-83.
Along with the imposition of national caste system, the supremacy of Hindu ethos in national life was also maintained by making Nepali (Khas Bhasa), a Sanskrit based language, the national language i.e. the language of the government, administration and in more recent times, education.

The cultural transformation undergone by the non Hindu tribal people, during centuries of Hindu rule in the unified Nepal since mid-eighteenth century - has often been described by the scholars as Hinduization or Sanskritization of the multi-cultural society of Nepal. The concept of Sanskritization developed by the eminent Indian Sociologist, M.N. Srinivas - referred to the upward mobility of castes in the social hierarchy. He observed that the lower castes in order to raise their position in the caste hierarchy, adopted some customs of the Brahmins and gave up some of their own habits considered impure or inferior by higher castes. To denote this process of upward social mobility, Srinivas first used the term "Brahmanisation" which later he replaced by "Sanskritization". However, in the context of Nepal, the term has been used to describe the state introduction (through law) of the Hindu ideal. As from the study of history of Nepali Society, it can be empirically established that "Sanskritization was largely through 'introduction' nay, imposition of the 'Law of the Hindu

ideal". And that the process of Sanskritization was nothing but the subjugation of tribes to the dominant ruling class of high castes in Nepal.\textsuperscript{40}

However according to some Nepalese social scientists, Sanskritization or Hinduization was an inescapable feature of the Himalayan Society - which had long provided a contact zone between the Hindus and the diverse tribal groups in the region. It is also being pointed out that this socialisation process had also not been an entirely one-sided affair. Hindu orthodoxy in Nepal has itself been somewhat softened as a result of close interaction and mutual influence between the Hindu migrants and the natives of the hills, writes Prayag Raj Sharma.\textsuperscript{41} The ethnic groups too, were similarly affected as the process of Hinduization varied in degree ranging from an outward limitation of Hindu mannerism by some, to seeking promotion into the caste order by some others. It is in this regard that Prayag Raj Sharma an eminent Nepali sociologist comments that 'tribal-caste distinction in Nepal seems less like a dichotomy and more like a continuum, and the Hindu-tribal synthesis is a fact of Nepal's unique historicity.'\textsuperscript{42} Thus, the flexibility of the Hindu-tribal interaction in a way, helped in consolidating the process of Sanskritization, under the aegis of the monarchy.

\textsuperscript{40} K. Pradhan n.11, p.164.

\textsuperscript{41} Prayag Raj Sharma, "Hindu Tribal Interface" \textit{CNAS Journal} (Kathmandu) Vol.VI 1978, p.6.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid. Also refer Urmila Phadnis, \textit{Ethnicity & Nation Building in South Asia} (New Delhi, 1990), pp. 118-119; Prayag Raj Sharma "Nepali Culture and Society" in K.P. Malla ed.,n.10, p.165.
Monarchy and Nation Building

Notwithstanding the changing role in the supremacy of the monarchy, in power terms, since the middle of the eighteenth century, the institution of Monarchy has been the linchpin of the Nepalese polity. It has enjoyed a broad consensus because of its historical role in both the making of modern Nepal as well as 'integrating people into a single nationhood'.

If the inter-ethnic relationships are still relatively stable in Nepal, the credit goes to the country's unique history. What kept Nepal integrated was the so called 'harmonic model' of feudal pre-modern government. The values within this model were decreed by the ruling elites. The harmonic model adopted by the monarchy for building a cohesive Nepal, was based on the value that envisaged a natural Hindu outlook, and a legally acknowledged arrangements in the old legal code (1854) of Nepal by which it incorporated even the most culturally contrasting ethnic societies into one social order, by giving each of them a definite place in their caste rankings.

Realising the significance of symbols of nationalism or national unity as important tools in the hands of ruling elites engaged in the nation building process, Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors also identified nationalist symbols for unifying its diverse population into one single nation. As mentioned earlier four pillars of Nepali nationalism thus identified, were (i) Unquestioning power and authority of the Hindu King of Gorkha or in other words Gorkha supremacy; (ii) The supremacy of the Hindu ethos in national life or declaring Hinduism as the

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44 Ibid.
state religion; (iii) Social integration through Hindu social system based on caste division; and
(iv) Making Nepali (Khasa Kura) also known as Gorkhali as the lingua franca and hence the
language of government administration and later on education. In short, Hinduism,
Monarchy and Nepali language became the conventional symbols of a historically weak Nepali
Nationalism.

Among all the symbols of Nepali nationalism, it is needless to say that monarchy
remained the single most important one. The continuation of the Shah dynasty from 1769 upto
the present times is a unique feature of Nepalese monarchy and nationhood. It needs to be
pointed out that even during the Rana (hereditary prime ministers) rule, though the monarch
was reduced to the status of a puppet, yet the sovereignty (though nominal) remained vested
in the crown. The Rana rulers could not abandon the crown as they themselves required the
institution of crown, for continuation of their rule.

Modernization and Monarchy:

Modern states are based on the newer values of democracy, human rights, equality of
opportunities and social justice. These novel and external notions of governance entered Nepal
during the 1951 anti-Rana revolution. The 1950-51 revolution was epoch-making in Nepali
politics, not only for it dispelled the traditional concept of political absolutism as a basis for
nation building but also for the progressive role played by the monarch Tribhuvan Narayan
Shah, by siding with the forces of democracy and liberation. The moral support of the monarch

45 R.S. Chauhan “Nation Building in Nepal” in B.C. Uprety and Ramakant (ed.) Nation
Building in South Asia (N.Delhi, 1991) p.371. And P.R. Sharma, n.2.
gave it the shape of national liberation movement. Hence, all forces - the King, the Nepali Congress and the Ranas agreed to herald a smooth transition from tradition to modernity. Thereby entering into a general agreement for bringing in a democratic era.

The post revolution politics thus began with the Nepali people and the King sharing a common front for ushering in constitutional democracy and ending the authoritarian Rana oligarchy. However, soon the enthusiasm of both the king and the political groups dissipated when they started behaving contrary to the objective of the revolution. In the opinion of Lok Raj Baral, "such an abrupt change in 1951, without having a sustained mass movement, could end the family rule of the Ranas but not the deep rooted authoritarian political culture of the past". Hence, the political role of the Monarchy again assumed importance as the King Tribhuvan came to be regarded as the architect of democratic Nepal with his declaration of the formation of a Constituent Assembly. The role of the monarchy in restructuring Nepalese polity and society, however, intensified with King Mahendra's accession to the throne in 1955. Juxtaposed between the process of consolidation of power and the popular demands for holding general elections, King Mahendra had to allow the drafting of the nation's first democratic constitution in 1958. Eventually in 1959, political parties contested the first ever held parliamentary elections on the basis of universal adult franchise. After eighteen months,

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47 Ibid.
49 A.R. Poudyal, n.4, p.93.
however, the parliamentary process was terminated by its own creator - the King, on the grounds of its incompatibility with traditional ethos of Nepali society.\(^{50}\) Instead, the King emphasised on the introduction of a 'partyless' system which could be used both as a substitute for the abandoned parliamentary system, and a mechanism for legitimising his new regime. Two fundamentals which were congruent with the traditional ethos of the Nepalis were immediately accepted: an unquestioned royal leadership and partyless character of the new order.\(^{51}\)

Thus it appears that the role of monarchy in nation-building although crucial, has also been contradictory in itself. The monarchy has been a source of nationalism and has also provided a cohesive emotional basis for national unity of disparate regions, caste and communities. Many are also of the view that the institution of monarchy is the manifestation of history, religion, culture and politics of Nepal, and there is little doubt about the significant role of monarchy in the nation building of Nepal\(^{52}\), irrespective of its policies and measures. Nonetheless, the great impact of indigenous Nepali political culture which has been predominantly ‘subject’ (culture) and ‘authoritarian’, remained embedded in the Nepali political tradition according to the views of Lok Raj Baral.\(^{53}\) As the ruling family was

\(^{50}\) Lok Raj Baral, n.48, p.320.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p.321.

\(^{52}\) On the effective role of Monarchy in nation building in Nepal, S.D. Muni is of the view that “King Mahendra made the single largest and most important contribution in building contemporary Nepal into an aspirant modern society... The system, the ethos and the styles of governance initiated and nursed by him seem to have struck firm roots in Nepal”. S.D. Muni, ed. *Nepal: An Assertive Monarchy* (New Delhi, 1977), p.vii.

\(^{53}\) L.R. Baral, n.48, p.317.
essentially the ‘core’ of politics during the Shah and the Rana periods, the primary loyalty (of the rulers) predominantly remained to the family interests rather than the interests of the nation.\textsuperscript{54} The post 1950 period - the so called ‘democratic era’ - tried to experiment a new political culture by innovating popular institutions and values, but these efforts were diluted by the constraints of history and tradition. Consequently, the political process in the post revolution Panchayat period lacked deep political commitment of Nepali political elites, and the traditional political culture (i.e. the ‘subject’ culture), which always glorified authority, was also strong among political participants. The prevailing norm of the aspirants was to seek royal patronage rather than to strive for a mass following.\textsuperscript{55}

Thus till the establishment of multiparty democracy and participatory political system in Nepal in 1990 - the role of monarchy vis-à-vis nation building had been both integrative and disruptive. While it provided the symbol of national unity and integrity and thus enjoyed a broad based consensus for its historical role as a creator of modern Nepal. On the other hand, the absolute power enjoyed by the King, stalled the growth of all the democratic political institutions that were rival to the institution of monarchy and therefore acted as a barrier to the process of modernization.

Changing Concept of Nationalism: From Homogeniety to Heterogeneity

With the advent of multi-party democracy in 1990, not only the political and economic structures have become competitive, the heterogenous cultural traditions of Nepalese society


\textsuperscript{55} L.R. Baral, n.48, pp.317-321.
have also come out in open. Today, the stress is more on ethnic group differences rather than on similarities.

As nation building in Nepal was initiated by the ruling dynasty which conquered various ethnic and cultural groups, spread all over the difficult terrain of Nepal, a uniform and homogenous national culture was deemed essential for bringing together the multi-ethnic groups of society. For this, the enforcement of Khas Bhasa (Nepali language, or language of Gorkha rulers), and Hinduised traditions and cultural ethos, on all the varied groups seemed the most effective measures to establish homogeneity in society. However, the centrally imposed culture of assimilation could not satisfy demands of other language and cultural groups. In the same vein these groups criticised the Nepali language (a Sanskrit based language written in Devnagari script), for being the only national language, and for getting official patronage. In their view, it is the language spoken by only 50 percent of the people, and feel that Nepali being the ruler's language has occupied dominant place in all fields of administration, court and in other public institutions. It was not only the Shah dynasty or the Rana rule which encouraged Nepali as the national language, - the post 1950 Nepal and its democratic constitution in 1959 also conformed to the old policies. Therefore with the constitutional protection, indeed, no other language of Nepal could flourish. This helped Nepali language to develop as the strongest asset of Nepali nationhood and vehicle for preserving and articulating the national

57 Ibid.
spirit and the historical experience. However, now there is a growing resentment among the non-Nepali speakers as they were being deprived from socio-economic and political benefits.

The multi-lingual character of Nepal is best stated in the presence of around 40 distinct linguistic groups mostly of Tibeto-Burman origin. Although the exact number of the languages spoken in Nepal is yet to be confirmed, linguists working in Nepal have calculated about forty different languages even though the official census data still shows the existence of only 33 different local languages other than Nepali. In a multi-lingual country like Nepal, ethnic and group identities are bound to emerge with growth in education, therefore, not only the Newars (for 'Nepal bhasha' i.e. Newari) and Terai people (for Hindi) but also the Rai-kirati, Tamang, Gurung, Magar and other Tibeto-Burman speakers of Mongoloid fold have been putting up demands from time to time for due State recognition to their respective languages, and against the official patronization of only one language.

59 Prayag Raj Sharma, n.43, p.130.
60 CBS, n.1, p.44.
### Table 1. Distribution of population of Nepal by Mother Tongue, 1952/54-1991*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother tongue</th>
<th>1952/54</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Aryan</td>
<td>6351899</td>
<td>77.13</td>
<td>7496528</td>
<td>79.14</td>
<td>6606758</td>
<td>52.45</td>
<td>12417886</td>
<td>82.66</td>
<td>14701283</td>
<td>79.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>4013567</td>
<td>48.74</td>
<td>4796528</td>
<td>50.96</td>
<td>6060758</td>
<td>52.45</td>
<td>12417886</td>
<td>82.66</td>
<td>14701283</td>
<td>79.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maithili</td>
<td>1024780</td>
<td>12.44</td>
<td>1130402</td>
<td>12.01</td>
<td>1327242</td>
<td>11.49</td>
<td>1668309</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>2191900</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhojpuri</td>
<td>477281</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>577357</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>806480</td>
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<td>1142805</td>
<td>7.61</td>
<td>1379717</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tharu</td>
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<td>4.37</td>
<td>406907</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>495861</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>545685</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>993338</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Adhuni</td>
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<td>3.99</td>
<td>477090</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>316950</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>234343</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>374635</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<td>Rajbansi</td>
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<td>0.43</td>
<td>55803</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>55124</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>59383</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>85558</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
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<td>Hindi</td>
<td>80181</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>2867</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Urdu</td>
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<td>2650</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
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<td>9412996</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>11555933</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>15022839</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>18491097</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Tibeto-Burman</td>
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<td>2013083</td>
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<td>1982635</td>
<td>17.16</td>
<td>1811944</td>
<td>12.06</td>
<td>3098698</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>5.62</td>
<td>555356</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>522416</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>904456</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newari</td>
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<td>4.65</td>
<td>377721</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>454979</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>487466</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>690007</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magar</td>
<td>273780</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>254675</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>288383</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>216281</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>430264</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rai,Kirat</td>
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<td>2.87</td>
<td>239745</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>232264</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>221333</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>439312</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurung</td>
<td>162192</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>157778</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>171609</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>174464</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>227198</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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<td>Limbu</td>
<td>145511</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>138705</td>
<td>1.47</td>
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<td>129234</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>254038</td>
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<td>Bhote,Sherpa</td>
<td>70132</td>
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<td>84229</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>79218</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>73489</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>121819</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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<td>Surawar</td>
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<td>13362</td>
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<td>20380</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>10650</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>Durbar</td>
<td>9138</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>11624</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>9959</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>13522</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>23721</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thakali</td>
<td>3307</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>6432</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5289</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>7113</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Munda</td>
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<td>29485</td>
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<td>5804</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>8030</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
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<td>0.85</td>
<td>114392</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>487060</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>764002</td>
<td>5.09</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>6432</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9157</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>9412996</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>11555933</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>15022839</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>18491097</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Comparison of data from 1952-91 is drawn only on the basis of 19 major languages since the very first census of 1952-54 listed only 19 languages.


The data (in the table 1) of the population breakdown of Nepal by mother tongue from 1952-52 to 1991 indicate that till 1981 census the number of Nepali speaking population has steadily increased. However, the 1991 census indicate some significant changes. Not only the percentage of Nepali speakers has gone down from 58.36% in 1981 to 50.31% in 1991, the...
population of Tibeto-Burman groups and Tharus increased substantially. However, it would be incorrect to assume a drastic change in language composition of the population and they should be rather interpreted in terms of the change of attitude of the respondents. Since the 1991 census was carried out just after the promulgation of democratic constitution of 1990, which characterised Nepal as a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic kingdom, many people who had responded to the previous census as Nepali speaking felt free to respond this time as speakers of their own mother tongues.

The constitution of 1990, was widely welcomed for multi-party democracy in Nepal and for acknowledging for the first time multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious character of Nepali nation. It has also enshrined the right of each community to preserve and promote its own languages, script and culture and to operate schools upto primary level in its own mother tongue, [Clause 6(2) and Art. 18(2)]. Janajatis (viz. the Mongoloid ethnic groups) and other non-Nepali speakers however point out that such rights would be of little help without the provision of governmental financial support – because the declaration of Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom and Nepali as the national language enforces the government only to promote Nepali and its mother language Sanskrit through State fundings even as it ignores the culture and languages of the other communities. Nepalese intellectuals like Bal. Pokharel and Rishikesh Shaha have very aptly suggested that instead of patronising Sanskrit, Nepali language could be enriched by adopting vocabulary from the various other languages of Tibeto-Burman origin. In this connection, Shaha observes, "words borrowed from Sanskrit do

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not always have the same natural vigour, simplicity and raciness as the expressions borrowed from the dialects.\textsuperscript{62}

The process of legitimising the Hindu religion and its cultural ethos by the Nepalese ruling elites for building a homogenous national culture, should be traced back to King Prithvi Narayan Shah, who besides his military power, had depended on the Hindu religion for integrating the diverse society. The King's intentions were best expressed in his statement, 

...if (my) soldiers and courtiers are not given to seeking pleasure, my sword can strike in all directions. If they are given to pleasure, this will not remain a kingdom acquired with no little pain by me, but (it will be) a common garden for all kinds (of peoples). If everyone is watchful, this will be a true Hindustan (Hindu land) of all higher and lower four castes and thirty-six varnas.\textsuperscript{63}

This attitude perhaps continues to dominate the outlook of the Hindus of Nepal even today. Harka Gurung observed that it is a normal process that in the early stage of nation building, the conquerors impose their rule and cultural values on the vanquished. Thus the social and religious transformation undergone by the non-Hindu tribes of Mongoloid origin (Janjatis) was referred to as Hinduization and Sanskritization. Gurung further says that the process of Hinduization through the legal code was not integration and assimilation but incorporation and absorption within the caste hierarchy.\textsuperscript{64} The official declaration of Nepal as a Hindu State was however made in 1962 by King Mahendra when he proclaimed his Panchayat

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{63} K. Pradhan, n.11, p.155.

\textsuperscript{64} Harka Gurung, n.4, p.146.
Constitution. The insertion of the word Hindu was deemed necessary by the Kind as it ensured the supreme sovereign power of the monarch in the wake of growing demands for acknowledging the plurality of the Nepalese society and its democratic rights.

For similar reasons, this Religious character of the state continues to find expression in the democratic constitution of 1990 [Art.4 of the 1990 Constitution declared Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom], as the Palace ensured the insertion of the word 'Hindu' for retaining the legitimacy of the Hindu monarch to continue as the constitutional head of the nation. It goes without saying that such a proclamation has given rise to resentments and serious controversy over the question of religious composition of the State of Nepal. Although the official census reports since 1952 onwards have been showing high percentage of Hindus (89% - 90%) [See table 2], doubts have been raised by the non-Hindus over the sincerity and methods adopted by the enumerators in determining people's religion.\(^{65}\)

Table 2. Distribution of population of Nepal by Religion, 1952/54-1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>1952/54</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>7318392</td>
<td>88.87</td>
<td>8254403</td>
<td>87.69</td>
<td>10330009</td>
<td>89.39</td>
<td>13445787</td>
<td>89.50</td>
<td>15990953</td>
<td>86.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>707104</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>870991</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>866411</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>790081</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>1439142</td>
<td>7.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.54</td>
<td>280597</td>
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<td>351186</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>399197</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>653218</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirat</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>318389</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>831</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>5836</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
<td>7561</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2541</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>3891</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>31280</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>365445</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>26416</td>
<td>0.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unstated</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5716</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18138</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total | 8235079 | 100.0 | 9412996 | 100.0 | 11555983 | 100.0 | 15022839 | 100.0 | 18491097 | 100.0 |


Parashu Ram Tamang while discussing the problems of the 'Janjatis', points out that inspite of Nepal being a multi-religious country the legacy of the Hindu Kingdom actually started from the times of Prithvi Narayan Shah when he declared his 'Gorkha empire' as the real Hindu country. Since then he observes there have been deliberate state policies to incorporate non Hindus within the broad gamut of Hinduism. Buddhism and Kirat (animist) religion were taken as branches of Hinduism. (The figures in the Table confirms this, as for the first time Kirati population is recorded in 1991 census). Whereas the Muslims though considered as followers of 'bideshi' (foreign) religion, were yet identified with the low caste category of the Hindu caste hierarchy and were strictly prohibited from preaching their religion among the non-Muslims. Hence all throughout, the census figures showed a steady figure of the Muslims (Table 2). The discontent among the Muslims about their figures in the census report is too coming out in open in the present day democratic Nepal.

The 'All Nepal Janajati Mahasangh' (an apex body of 22 Mongoloid ethnic groups) claims that 70% of the total population of Nepal comprise of janjatis, and all of whom were originally non-Hindus. They inhabited particular regions or territory and were the earlier inhabitants of Nepal (i.e. before the immigration of Indo-Aryan Hindu caste groups from India.

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67 Andras Hofer, n. 32, pp. 161-162. For more details refer the following chapters on the Muslims.
took place). As pointed out by Bhattachan and Pyakural until 1768 there were 12 ethnic clusters (i) Awadhi, (ii) Bhojpuri, (iii) Jadan (iv) Khambuan (v) Khasan (vi) Kochila (vii) Limbuan (viii) Magarat (ix) Maithil (x) Nepal (Kathmandu valley) (xi) Tamba Saling and (xii) Tamuan.68 One of the major demands of the Janjati movements is the establishment of federal administrative and financial framework based on those ancient regional clusters. They also demand pluralist approaches in the religious culture and language policies of the present Nepali state. Besides demand for a secular state, they stress for equal treatment for all languages viz. in education and media, and strongly object to the state patronage of 'Sanskrit' language (making it compulsory curriculum at the high school level), as it would definitely reduce the scope of higher education among the Janjati (Tibeto-Burman language groups) students.69

The general grievances of all sections of population against the 1991 Census Report, can be explained in terms of their sudden rise in expectation from the 'people's government' formed in 1990, dislodging the age-old feudal, authoritarian power structure. However, the claims made by various ethnic, regional and caste organizations regarding their own population - such as Janjati Mahasangh - 70% Janjatis; 'Utpidit Jatiya Utthan Manch' (The Front for the Upliftment of the Oppressed Castes) - 60% untouchable Hindu castes; Sadbhawna Party - 50% Terai people etc., are more based on sentiments than on factual data.70


69 Ibid. Also refer All Nepal Janjati Sangh's, Interim Constitution, Akhil Nepal Janjati Sangh ko Antarim Vidhan tatha Ghoshana patra, 2051.

70 Om Gurung, Ibid, n.69.
But the Brahmin-Chetri bias in census data enumeration is evident (needless to mention that census enumerators are dominated by Brahmans and Chetris), when it continues to show that not only the Hindus are in majority, but Brahmans and Chetris are in majority too. Since according to the 1991 census itself, it is clear that no single caste or non-caste ethnic group is more than 17 percent of the total national population.\textsuperscript{71} The fact that Hinduism and Buddhism (along with its branches like Shamanism) are the major religions of Nepal since ages, also do not reflect in the census data which had been showing a meager 5% - 8% presence of Buddhists in all of its six census reports (see Table 2). Notwithstanding the criticism, the latest census (1991) is considered as a pathbreaking one - (even if it did not satisfy the Janjati groups; as they claim much higher number of Buddhists, neither the Muslims, who believe that their presence accounts for double the amount shown in census) - solely because for the first time it is confirming a reversal in the national trends by showing a decline of 2.99% of Hindus from 89.5% in 1981 to 86.51% today. And also, 5.14% decline of speakers of Nepali as mother tongue - from 58.36% in 1981 to 50.31% today (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Thus in this study, one cannot but of course come to a conclusion that all the three tenets of Nepali nationalism, i.e. Monarchy, Hinduism and Nepali language, are on decline, nevertheless given the obvious trends there is a certain need to strive for a new definition of Nepali nationalism by embracing diversity and taking pride in the indigenous traditions rather than being insistent on imposing monolithic cultural identity.

The wider freedom available to the Nepali population since the political change of Spring 1990 has brought sentiments, long suppressed, to the surface. Numerous ethnic, linguistic and regional organizations have been vocal against the established notions of nationalism. Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP), representing the Madhesi (i.e. people heralding from the Gangetic plains and settled in the plains of Terai) community of the Terai, feel that unless the madhesi people get due representation in the political process and decision-making and their regional aspirations are satisfied on an institutional basis, there can be no common nationalism. Their demands include recognition of Hindi as the language of the Terai and their better representation in the Civil Services and various organs of the government. In fact, Sadbhavana Party was the only political party that explicitly raised ethnopolitical issues during elections in the post 1990 Nepal. The NSP very strongly criticized the 'Pahades' (hill people) for treating the Madhesis as second class citizens of Nepal and hence demanded regional autonomy for the Terai. While the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh, on its part attempts to incorporate the widest possible number of "nationalities". To avoid discrimination against any linguistic or cultural group, the Mahasangh avoids defining "janajati" in terms of some Kirat/Mongoloid and Khasa/Caucosoid divide, and instead defines it in opposition to the Hindu Varna System and Hindu caste groups. Following this argument, Janajatis describe themselves

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73 Ibid. Also see K.B. Bhattachan "Ethnopolitics and Ethnodevelopment: An Emerging Paradigm in Nepal" in Dhruta Kumar (ed.) *State, Leadership and Politics in Nepal* (Kathmandu, 1995), p.131. For a better understanding of 'Terai peoples' grievances against the hill domination, see chap IV of the thesis.
as "fundamentally non-Hindu".\textsuperscript{74} This explicit anti-Hinduism reflects the recent tendency of many of these ethnic associations to actively agitate for a return to their indigenous culture, and to reject the influence of years of Hinduization. To them Nepal is not a nation, but a nation in the making. In the words of Subhash Nembang, an attorney and member of the Upper House of Parliament, the preference is, 'for a Single nation composed of numerous nationalities',\textsuperscript{75} as the stated goals of the Mahasangh are "to respect the freedom, equality, and fraternity of other janajati organizations; to encourage different cultures to flower and to make a single sovereign state of nations."\textsuperscript{76}

Thus, the famous Nepali Couplet, - "\textit{Euta bhasa, euta des, euta raja, euta bhes}" (one language, one country, one king and one dress),\textsuperscript{77} which long remained the favourite slogan of the Nepali patrimonial elites - to maintain their age-old hegemony over all the ethnic and cultural groups in the name of national integration - is fast loosing its popularity in the open, democratic environment of the present day Nepal. In this changed context, social scientists are pointing out that 'heterogeneity' and not 'homogeneity', should be the ideal of nation building in a multi-cultural society like Nepal. However they differ on the approaches that are to be adopted by the state in its pursuit of nation-building while one section believes multi-


\textsuperscript{75} Observations made by Janajati leaders like Subhash Ale Magar, Tamang and Subhash Nembang in William Fisher's article n.2, p.12.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} A slogan derived from the Nepali poet Balakrishna Sama's couplet, \textit{Hamro Raja, Hamro Desh; Hamro Bhasha, Hamro Bhes}. Also see, P.R. Sharma, "Nation Building in South Asia: The Case of Nepal" \textit{South Asia Journal} (New Delhi) vol.1 no.2 1989, p.267.
culturalism or the plurality of Nepali culture must be 'accommodated' and 'adjusted' officially. Once this cultural paradigm is accepted, the religious, linguistic racial and caste identities would no longer simply remain "ethnic identities" but submerge themselves into a new 'national identity' of people. The other prominent view, which represents the perspectives of the marginalised people, is that 'Legalisation of ethnopolitics is most crucial for ethnodevelopment'. The proponents of this view argue that caste and ethnicity are the most important components of Nepalese social structure and denial of ethnopolitics and ethnodevelopment has done more harm than good for various caste and ethnic groups. Hence, the state needs to design plans, policies and programmes to eliminate all kinds of existing (state protected) discriminations and ensure the socio-cultural, economic and political rights of all ethnic groups on equal terms. This alone would foster the process of social integration, a necessary precondition for national integration.

The rise in consciousness among ethnic groups about their indigenous identity and about the oppressive system of caste hierarchy is undoubtedly a historic development in the transitional society of Nepal. At the same time, it would not be proper to equate the ongoing movements (of Janjatis or regional organizations like Sadbhavana Party) as liberation movements against caste oppression or as pioneers of social and economic emancipation - since these are mostly urban based activities, having negligible grassroot organization at village

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78 Prayag Raj Sharma expresses his views on national integration, n.2, p.9 and n.79, pp.266-67.

79 Dilli Ram Dahal "Ethnic Cauldron, Demography and Minority Politics" in Dhruva Kumar (ed.) n.73, p.168.

80 K. Bhattachan, n.73, p.144. Also refer Bhattachan and Pyakural, n.68, pp.31-32.
level; moreover, as these movements are still at their formative stage, leadership is likely to be in the hands of power seeking people. Simple 'accommodation' and acceptance' of diversity might lead to fostering of ethnic and religious 'élites' who would get into an alliance with the state to maintain a status quo, and vis-a-vis a control over their respective ethnic groups in return of scarce political and economic benefits. Thus, in the Nepali context, it is imperative to reconcile economic and social reforms since various ecological zones represents their own distinct social groups; resolving the dichotomy between the rich and the impoverished regions becomes essential to facilitate economic development, and social and cultural recognition (of the marginalised communities), for the true integration of the country.